



# Lawn & Garden

**The Mendota Reporter**  
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## Types of bird feed for backyard feeders

Birding is a wildly popular hobby. According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, about 45 million Americans are birders, while data from the popular bird observation app eBird indicates that submissions from Canadian birders increased by 34 percent in 2020.

It's not uncommon for birding enthusiasts to travel great distances to see beautiful birds in serene settings. But individuals also can entice beautiful birds to come to them. Bird feeders beckon birds to millions of backyards every day, making them an ideal addition to properties owned by people with an affinity for avians. After choosing a bird feeder, novices may not know which food to fill it with. This breakdown, courtesy of the National Wildlife Federation®, can help anyone find the right food for their feeders.

- **Nectar:** Individuals who want to attract hummingbirds can do so with nectar, which the NWF describes as colored sugar water. Nectar must be placed into a hummingbird feeder and also

might attract orioles to the backyard.

- **Black-oil sunflower:** The NWF notes that black-oil sunflower is the most popular bird seed. Black-oil sunflower attracts an array of birds, including blue jays, cardinals, chickadees, and sparrows. Novices may like that black-oil sunflower seed can even be found at many grocery stores, which can appeal to individuals who live in remote locations without specialty bird stores nearby.

- **Mixes:** Seed mixes also can be found at grocery stores and appeal to a variety of birds. Individuals who want to keep their feeders close to their decks or patios may want to look for mixes described as "no-mess." The NWF indicates that these mixes have been dehulled, which means there won't be as big a pile of unwanted seeds beneath the feeder. That tends to be the case with regular mixes that birds pick through as they choose which seeds they want and discard the others, often dropping them to the ground beneath the feeder. The NWF re-

ports that mixes tend to attract ground-feeding birds, such as doves and sparrows.

- **Suet:** Suet is sought after in winter by bird lovers who want to help birds stay healthy and strong during times of year when food sources are scarce. Suet requires a suet feeder, which is unlike most bird feeders. Suet comes in squares and isn't in seed form, though seeds are typically mixed in to the gelatinous cake. Despite its appearance, which can seem like a square block of fat, suet is an excellent source of protein for birds in winter.

- **Thistle or nyjer:** The NWF notes that goldfinches love this small, high-quality seed. Because thistle or nyjer is something of a specialty seed, birders who want to put it out will need to purchase a finch feeder.

Birding has millions of devotees across the globe. Knowing what to feed birds can be a great way for birding enthusiasts to attract these beautiful creatures to their own backyards.



## What to do about moss in your lawn

Moss may look whimsical on stones in the woods, but most homeowners would prefer their lawns be free of it.

A lush, green lawn is a point of pride for many homeowners. Eye-catching landscaping anchored by a healthy lawn is one of the key ways to improve the value and curb appeal of a home. In fact, the experts at HGTV say an attractive and well-maintained landscape can add as much as 10 percent to the value of a home.

Maintaining a thriving lawn takes effort, and that means recognizing when the green in the yard may not necessarily be coming from soft blades of grass. Invasive greenery, including moss, can infiltrate a lawn and that can be problematic if left unaddressed.

A mossy lawn is a sign that certain conditions are ripe for the moss, but not necessarily the grass, to grow. According to Lowes, moss thrives in certain conditions, which should be addressed if homeowners hope to corral it.

- Moss does well in acidic soil, more so than traditional grasses. A soil test can confirm if the pH needs to be adjusted to make it more hospitable to grass and less friendly to moss.

- Compacted soil and excess thatch can make it easier for moss to take root. These conditions also can make the soil damp and restrict drainage, something that promotes moss growth.

- Moss can grow in shady conditions. If

patches of the lawn have been overrun by moss, there could be too much shade in the area. Trimming back trees or shrubbery may help; otherwise, homeowners may need to look into hardscape or plants that thrive in such conditions to remedy shady and damp areas on portions of their landscapes.

Moss typically can be removed the same way one would dethatch a lawn. It involves rigorously raking or agitating the lawn to loosen the moss. This can be done by hand with a rake, or in the case of a lot of moss or a large lawn, with a dethatching blade attachment for a lawn mower.

Aerating the soil will help keep moss that was removed from returning. In addition, amending the soil so that it has a more dense nutritional profile by adding compost, as well as improving drainage and adjusting the pH, are keys to keeping moss from returning.

For pesky moss, The Spruce suggests making a solution of one box of baking soda to two gallons of water and spraying this solution on the patches of moss. It is a natural alternative to using chemical products. Certain sources indicate a glyphosate herbicide could work on moss, but the World Health Organization considers glyphosate to be a probable human carcinogen and it is prohibited in certain areas.

Moss may be green, but it's often not the type of green homeowners desire in their lawns. Learning about moss can help when removing it and preventing it in the future.

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# The benefits of planting native species

Spring and summer present ideal growing conditions for many plants, making these seasons an ideal time to tend to lawns and gardens. Though it's easy to succumb to the temptation of exotic plants, avid gardeners and eco-conscious planters recognize the significance of native plants.

Novices may not realize that native plants are much better for a landscape and the local ecosystem it calls home. Recognition of the many benefits of native plants can make for healthier lawns and gardens and a healthier planet as well.

• Native plants are built for local climates. One of the issues gardeners who

plant exotic plants run into is keeping those plants thriving when weather turns harsh. For example, exotic plants may require extra watering in areas that experience drought or even long periods without precipitation in spring and notably summer. The United States Environmental Protection Agency reports that at least 40 states anticipate water shortages by 2024. Planting native plants can help to combat those shortages by reducing the need to water plants if conditions become dry in late spring and summer.

• Native plants save money. It's also important to note that native plants save homeowners money. Because they're capable

of thriving in local conditions, native plants tend to require less watering, which can help homeowners reduce their utility costs. But native plants also require less upkeep, which means homeowners can save on potentially costly, not to mention eco-unfriendly, pesticides and other amendments in order to maintain the look of exotic plants. And though it's not always the case, exotic plants tend to cost more at nurseries than natives.

• Native plants save gardeners time. In addition to saving money, native plants don't require as much attention. Though spring and summer is a great time to be in the yard,

it's also a great time to be out and about. Because native plants thrive in local conditions, gardeners won't need to spend much of their free time tending to them. Exotics tend to require a lot of extra attention and effort, especially when conditions become harsh. Spending more time outdoors in harsh weather does not appeal to most gardeners.

• Native plants blend in with an existing landscape. Native plants look natural within an existing landscape, adding some instant aesthetic appeal without breaking the bank. When planting exotics, homeowners may feel a need to redesign their entire gardens to create a cer-



tain look (think Japanese garden). That can quickly consume a budget and take up a lot of free time in both the short- and long-term.

Planting season marks

a great time to revitalize a landscape. Choosing native plants when doing so pays numerous dividends for homeowners and the planet they call home.

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# How to create more privacy on your property

An inviting backyard can serve as a welcome retreat from the hustle and bustle of daily life. After a long day at the office or an exhausting day spent transporting kids to and fro, it's hard to resist the allure of a peaceful outdoor space in which to unwind.

Privacy is a key component of any backyard oasis. Some homes may be so remote that privacy isn't an issue. But many suburban homeowners recognize they might need to tweak their landscapes if they hope to create a private oasis outside.

## *Fencing or planting?*

Most homeowners looking to create more privacy on their property will have to choose between fencing and planting. Fencing provides immediate privacy because, once it's installed, no one can see into the yard. Fencing also doesn't require watering or other immediate upkeep, which will be

necessary when planting to ensure tree roots can establish themselves.

But planting has its benefits as well. Planting for privacy is essentially creating a living fence that can grow over time and provide even more privacy as trees reach maturity. Plants also tend to be less costly than fencing. The home renovation experts at BobVila.com estimate that fencing projects typically cost between \$1,667 and \$4,075. However, fencing projects can cost considerably more than \$4,000, especially for homeowners with large properties they want to enclose. Large, mature trees can be expensive, though it's unlikely they will cost as much as fencing. In addition, fencing requires more maintenance and will potentially need to be replaced, while native trees won't require much upkeep and can last for generations.

## *Planting*

Homeowners who choose to plant for privacy will next have to decide which type of plants to add to their properties. Evergreens provide year-round privacy because they don't shed their leaves, so these are the ones most often chosen when creating a living fence. A number of varieties of evergreen trees can do the job, but it's important that homeowners consult with a landscape architect prior to choosing trees so they can ensure the trees will thrive when faced with the growing conditions on their

properties. During such a consultation, homeowners may discuss the following popular privacy trees.

- **Leyland cypress:** The Arbor Day Foundation® notes that the Leyland cypress is popular for hedges and boundaries, likely because a typical tree reaches a mature height of 60'-70' and can spread as wide as 25'. The Leyland cypress grows fast, which may appeal to homeowners who don't want to wait to establish privacy.

- **Green Giant Arborvitae:** There are different

varieties of the arborvitae, but the Green Giant tends to be the go-to option for privacy. The ADF notes that Green Giants will grow up to three feet per year until they reach maturity, providing a fast-growing option for privacy planters. The Green Giant can spread as wide as 20 feet at maturity, which is another attribute that makes it so popular among homeowners desiring privacy.

- **Eastern White Pine:** The ADF notes that the eastern white pine, which can reach heights as high as 80 feet, is favored in spacious yards.

That's likely due to its height and its potential spread, which can reach 40 feet. Homeowners who choose the eastern white pine might like it for its resemblance to a Christmas tree, and in fact it is widely used for that purpose. The privacy provided by the eastern white pine is significant, but it might be best suited to especially large properties.

Whether it's fencing or planting, homeowners have many options to consider as they seek to create more privacy on their properties.



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# What to know about installing a pool at home

Summer is a season of relaxation when school is not in session, vacation season is in full swing and people everywhere are getting outside and soaking up the summer sun. It's hard to imagine how that can get any better. But it can for people thinking of installing a pool in their backyard.

Pools definitely have a wow factor that's hard to replicate. Homeowners considering pool installation can take note of these factors as they try to decide if a pool is right for them.

## Cost

The cost to install a pool depends on a host of factors, including which type of pool homeowners are considering and where they live. According to the online home improvement resource Angi (formerly Angie's list), the average cost to install an above ground pool in the United States in 2022 was \$3,322, while the average inground pool installation in the same year was \$55,000. That's quite a disparity in price, and homeowners should know that the average cost of each project is higher in certain regions and under certain circumstances. Potential ancillary costs, such as excavation and plumbing relocation, will add to the final cost of the project. The erection of fencing around the pool if no fencing currently surrounds the area where the pool will be located also will add to the final cost.

## Pool type

As noted, above ground pools, on average, require a considerably smaller financial investment than

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inground pools. This is an important consideration, but which option may ultimately prove the better investment is worth researching. Homeowners can speak with a local real estate professional to determine if an inground pool or above ground might yield a significantly higher return at resale. If an inground pool is likely to increase property value by a substantial amount, it could be well worth the extra upfront costs.

## Maintenance

Pools are undeniably fun, but they still require maintenance. The experts at Better Homes & Gardens note that vinyl liners in pools last approximately six to 10 years, while painted concrete may require a fresh coat of paint every five years. Plaster finishes may last as long as 15 years, while cement-coated products can last a lifetime. Pools also need periodic cleaning, and chemicals to keep the pool operating safely and cleanly will require an additional, if somewhat minimal, financial investment. Homeowners investing

in a new pool should be aware of the maintenance required to keep the pool clean and be willing to do that maintenance. And though homeowners typically can open and close pools on their own, it's also possible to hire someone to do it for a relatively small fee each season.

## Location

A survey of the land in a yard can reveal how smoothly a pool installation may or may not go. Though it's possible to install a pool in just about any yard, some spaces might require greater preparation and pre-installation effort than others. Sloped backyards, for example, may require the services of a landscape architect to prepare the space, which can extend the time it takes to complete the project and add the overall cost.

These are just some of the factors that merit consideration when mulling a pool installation. A homeowners' best resource might be a local pool company who can visit a home, provide an estimate and point out any challenges that may arise during the install.



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As people spend more time enjoying their properties, they can consider the many ways to make outdoor living spaces more comfortable.

## How to make outdoor living spaces more comfortable

Private backyards are now go-to spaces for recreation and entertainment and great places to recharge the body and mind.

One ripple effect of the COVID-19 pandemic was more time spent outdoors, even if it was predominantly on one's own property. OnePoll, in conjunction with the lawn care company TruGreen, surveyed 2,000 American homeowners and found participants spent 14 hours outside every week in 2021, which was three hours more than prior to the pandemic. In addition, respondents admitted that time spent outdoors was therapeutic.

A separate survey conducted for the International Casual Furnishings Association found that people now spend more time relaxing, gardening, exercising, dining, and entertaining outside than in years past. Though COVID-19 may no longer dominate headlines, the desire to enjoy outdoor spaces has not waned.

While enjoying outdoor living areas, homeowners can do all they can to make these spaces comfortable and welcoming. The following are some good starting points.

### Get all lit up

Outdoor spaces can be enjoyed no matter the hour when there is ample lighting. That could be why the International Casual Furnishings Association reports those who plan to renovate their outdoor spaces list outdoor lighting as a priority. Outdoor lighting not only sheds light on entertaining spaces, but also makes spaces safer and more secure.

### Increase privacy

No matter how friendly homeowners are with their neighbors, there comes a

time when privacy is paramount. Fencing, whether it is wood or vinyl, or even a natural fence made from closely planted hedges, can ensure residents feel comfortable venturing outdoors to swim, take a cat nap or even star gaze in private.

### Address the elements

Homeowners should note the direction their backyard faces and the typical daily conditions of the space. For example, a yard that faces southwest may get plenty of strong sun during the day, requiring the addition of shade trees, covered patios or arbors to cut down on the glare and heat. If the yard is often hit by winds, trees or bushes planted strategically as windbreaks can help.

### Sit comfortably

High-quality comfortable seating increases the likelihood that homeowners will want to stay awhile in their outdoor spaces. A deep seating set complete with plush chairs, outdoor sofa or love seat and chaise lounge chairs gives people more opportunity to sit and stay awhile.

### Take a dip

A pool can be the perfect gathering spot on a warm day, while a spa/hot tub can bridge the gap to cooler weather. According to the Family Handyman, soaking in hot tubs can relax tired muscles after a long day, loosen up stiff joints, improve cardiovascular health, and reduce the time it takes to fall asleep.

### Bite back at bugs

Homeowners may want to consider using a professional exterminator to get rid of ticks, mosquitoes and other nuisance insects from outdoor spaces.

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